



PROMOTING TRADITIONAL GHANAIAAN MUSIC EDUCATION AMONG CHILDREN: THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

Teaching traditional music in Ghanaian primary schools is given a low priority. Generalist teachers who are supposed to implement the Creative Arts curriculum of which music form one strand lack adequate knowledge and skills to provide musical learning experiences for their students. Performing traditional music of which children are active participants' forms part of the liturgical process of the Methodist and the Mozama Disco Christo Churches in Ghana. The role of these churches in promoting traditional Ghanaian music among primary school students is examined. Suggestions are made as to how teachers can utilise students' musical background experience to promote music literacy in the classroom.

KEYWORDS: Teaching, Primary School, Traditional Music, Churches, Ebibidwom, Ghana.

INTRODUCTION:

Children are no exception when it comes to appreciation of music and its related activities in everyday life (Jackman, 2005; Essa, 2003; Isbell & Raines, 2003). Children engage in various musical games whenever they come together to play (Dzansi, 2004; Countryman, 2014). Hobart and Frankel (1999) are of the view that certain musical values are expounded through the child's physical activities, intellectual growth, social and emotional responsiveness, moral development, language development as well as his or her aesthetic sensitivity leading to his or her holistic development. Writing on African music, Hickok (1996) acknowledged how music permeates the life of the African. It is used for initiation ceremonies, rituals and sacrifices, death and funerals, work, hunting and healing (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; Amuah et al, 2011). Mbiti (1991, p. 27) argues that "music gives outlet to the emotional expression of religious life, and it is a powerful means of communication in African traditional life". African traditional music develops children's creative abilities (Floyd, 1995) and enables them to take active part in the musical cultures of their communities (Nketia, 1999).

It has long been a major concern among music educators in Ghana that traditional music has not received the same attention as mainstream music in the primary school formal education system (Flolu & Amuah, 2003; Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016). Ghanaian music educators have come to realise the importance and contribution of traditional Ghanaian music to the total development of the Ghanaian child (Flolu and Amuah, 2003; Nketia, 1999). Indeed, concerns have been expressed and it continues to be expressed about the low priority being given to traditional Ghanaian music in the formal education system (see for example Dzansi, 2004).

In 2007, the Ghana Ministry of Education through the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) introduced the Creative Arts curriculum for Ghanaian primary schools. This curriculum is a combination of artistic processes of music, dance, drama, drawing and carving (CRDD, 2007). Unlike previous music curriculums for primary schools, the music section of the newly introduced Creative Arts curriculum contains a significant amount of topics and content on traditional Ghanaian music, a move which was anticipated to address the challenges associated with the neglect of teaching the subject in schools.

Despite the importance of Creative Arts education to the child, the literature (Amuah & Adum-Attah 2016, Bofo-Agyemang, 2010) suggests that Creative Arts education (including music) is not giving the needed attention in Ghanaian primary schools. Most generalist primary school teachers who are supposed to teach all curriculum subjects fill reluctant to teach music to their student because they lack adequate knowledge and skill to do so (Opoku-Asare et al, 2015; Bofo-Agyemang, 2010). Some international research findings also highlight on similar phenomenon (de Vries, 2011; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Joseph, 2015). This article therefore, examines the complementary role being played by the Methodist and the Mozama Disco Christo Churches in promoting traditional Ghanaian music education among children. Findings will inform teacher practices in the primary school music classroom. The main research question for this study is:

What is the significance of performing traditional Ghanaian sacred music during the liturgical process of church services?

The following paragraphs present overviews of music in Christian practice especially in the Methodist and the Mozama Disco Christo Churches in Ghana.

Music and Christianity in the Gold Coast:

Before gaining independence from Britain on the 6th of March, 1957, the present day Ghana located on the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean in Africa frontier of Sub-Saharan Africa was known as the Gold Coast (see Flolu & Amuah, 2003). It is bordered within West Africa by the Ivory Coast to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east and the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean to the south.

Christianity was introduced to this country in the 15th century (Flolu and Amuah, 2003; Ainoo, 2015; Amuah et al, 2014) by white missionaries from Europe. One of their major aims was to convert the indigenes into the Christian religion. The missionaries succeeded in converting few of the natives, and the training given to these converts tended to separate them from the rest of the community they originally belonged through 'saalem mission-kpodzi', (Ghanaian names for missionary residences) (Flolu and Amuah, 2003).

Agyemang and Nyarko (1996) report that Ephraim Amo's criticism of the missionaries' against their attitude to Ghanaian culture including its music in the church led to his dismissal from the Akropong Presbyterian Teacher Training College in 1934 where he (Ephraim Amo) was the music tutor. Specifically, Amo took an "uncompromising stand on the wearing of native cloth to preach, and lead the College choir to drum and sing traditional Ghanaian songs during church services" (Amuah et al, 2014, 88).

It became obvious that the missionaries were not in favour of the musical culture of the very people they had come to convert to Christianity, perceiving African materials used in performing music as pagan and not suitable for Christian worship (Ainoo, 2015; Willoughby, 1996; Amuah et al, 2014). As a result, many of the indigenes who trained as teachers during the colonial era were orientated with a curriculum that did not take the socio-cultural conditions of the people into consideration. These teachers taught traditional music in Ghanaian schools within the framework of European system of formal education for a very long period (Boamajeh and Ohene-Okanta, 2000; Amuah et al, 2011), thus, the knowledge of Ghanaian musical heritage has not been advanced much in formal education in Ghana even after the review of the basic school music syllabus to include traditional Ghanaian music in 2007.

It is worth noting that despite the negative effect of the missionaries' attitude to traditional Ghanaian music, the art is still alive in various societies and communities. The challenge now is how to preserve and perpetuate its practice effectively.

Music in the Methodist Church Ghana:

Christian missionaries from England led by Reverend Joseph Rhodes Dunwell introduced the Methodist Church to the Gold-Coast in 1835 (Freeman Centre for Missions and Leadership Development, 2014; Amuah et al, 2014). Music played an integral part of the liturgy in the church's worship activities. Presently, the singing of hymns and anthems in English and in local Ghanaian languages, and traditional sacred songs is very vibrant in the Church. This has become possible due to the formation of choirs and singing bands in various branches of the church. The usage of traditional Ghanaian sacred music in the church was, however, not permitted at the initial stage of its introduction in the Gold Coast (Amuah et al, 2014). The missionaries insisted on the use of Western hymns, anthems, chants and Western musical instruments as the only musical materials acceptable for Christian worship (Flolu & Amuah, 2003; Amuah et al, 2014; Willoughby, 1996).

According to Amuah et al. (2014), the text of hymns used during church services in the early days in the Methodist church was in English, a language which was not familiar to the natives and the new converts. They argued further that these hymns had no emotional appeal to the converts because they were in conflict with their musical background experiences hence did not allow for the kind of involvement they were used to in their social life and traditional worship. To these natives who were also not formally educated, the traditional mode of worship such as spontaneity in prayer, singing, clapping and dancing constitute the only way of achieving fulfillment. This phenomenon precipitated into the upsurge of ebibidwom (Akan sacred song) which allowed for full participation of the native believers in the liturgical process of the church. Currently, this musical type is widely used in all Methodist Churches in Ghana to reinforce sermons and also serve as a material for choral evangelism (Amuah et al, 2014). It is based on traditional Ghanaian melodic and harmonic patterns; the traditional call and response style is employed. A recitative style is used to introduce the subject. A chorus that is a reflection on the theme follows this. In the chorus, rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment in the form of hand clapping, drumming and now church organ accompaniment is utilized.

Although ebibinwom was introduced into the Methodist Church, its utilisation is more dynamic, vigorous and lively in the Mozama Disco Christo Church, a traditional Christian organisation which came out of the Methodist Church in the early part of the 20th century (Amy, 2002). The use of traditional sacred music forms an integral part of the churches' liturgy, and ebibidwom which portrays the culture of the natives serves as a backbone to the musical activities of the church. To this, Willoughby (1996, p. 166) is in agreement that "the purpose of African music may be to enhance religious service and educate children".

A brief historical background of the Mozama Disco Christo Church in Ghana:

According to Amy (2002), the Mozama Disco Christo Church began as a faith and prayer society under the leadership of Mr. Joseph William Appiah, a Catechist in the Methodist Church at Abura Oguam, a small town in the Central Region of Ghana in 1919. Amy explained that the society's activities were based on fasting and prayers through speaking in tongues, healing and prophesying with the use of traditional drumming, singing and dancing. In 1922, the then minister in charge of the Methodist Church in a town called Apam, Reverend G. R. Acquah, who also had oversight responsibility of the Methodist Church at Gomoa Oguam regarded the activities of the faith society as heathenism which was not in tune with the doctrines of the Methodist Church. The group's insistence in these activities resulted in expelling them from the Methodist Church (Amy, 2002).

After several migrations from one village to the other, the Faith Society finally settled at Mozano, also a small town in the Central Region of Ghana. This place became the National Headquarters of the Mozama Disco Christo Church, a name which was revealed by God to the Faith Society through J. W. E. Appiah in 1922. (Amy, 2002).

METHOD:

With the consent of the leadership, I sat through eight church services to observe the liturgical processes of two selected congregations of the Mozama Disco Christo Churches in the city of Kumasi on all the Sundays in June 2018. My reflections on observational notes taken concurred with the statement "African music typically, is created to include more than music" (Willoughby 1996, p. 166). Indeed, traditional Ghanaian chants with themes based on the text of the Bible were being performed spontaneously to support and emphasise preaching and readings from the Bible. Almost every member of the congregations took active part in the music performances with evidence of props, dancing and drama. The liturgical process of the services suggests a strong base of indigenous music tradition. A lot of traditional Ghanaian sacred chants with strong marked rhythms were sung with accompaniment of traditional musical instruments such as donno, atumpan, abrukuwa, (membranophones), dawuro, frikyiwa, tontonsansan, and trowa, (idiophones). While members of the congregation sang, they clapped, danced, and dramatized the words of the songs. The effectiveness of prayer and healing sessions which lasts for approximately forty minutes during the services were reinforced by singing ebibidwom.

To confirm my understanding and impression of observations made, I engaged eight members from the two churches in eight 20 minutes one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Interview data were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for validation by respondents. The open ended questions which guided the interviews flowed from the main research question of this study.

Leadership of the Churches observed selected two members after each church service to share their views on the Church's use of traditional sacred music with me.

Findings of the Interview:

Examination of the transcribed and validated responses of the interviews through inductive analysis approach indicates a strong believe among members of the churches that whenever traditional Ghanaian sacred chants and songs are used during healing sessions, healing angels from heaven are attracted to descend at the healing arena to deal with the sick spiritually and at the same time attack evil

forces having connection with the sickness to vanish. They also believed that singing Akan sacred songs during healing sessions is to develop the spiritual strength of the healer in order to stand against any spiritual attacks that may be encountered during such sessions.

Educational Implication and Conclusion

A specific objective stated in the Creative Arts syllabus for Primary Schools is: "the pupil will develop skills and artistic confidence in the presentation of the Performing Arts" (CRDD, 2007, 5). Nketia (1999) also acknowledged the importance of providing learning experiences that enable African children to acquire knowledge and understanding of traditional music and dance of their own environment. Without this preparation, they may not be able to participate fully in the life of the communities in which they belong. One important strategy through which children acquire musical knowledge and skills is through exposure to musical situations created in the society in which he or she is absorbed, and by active participation (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; Amuah et al, 2014). As children are exposed to these situations they acquire musical knowledge and skill through participation and slow absorption until they are able to express themselves fully (Dzanzi, 2004; Amuah et al, 2014). Nompula (2011) acknowledge the importance of developing children's creative skills by exposing them to cross-rhythms and syncopated rhythms which is a characteristic of African music.

The school is an important social institution through which children acquire their musical knowledge and skills (Boamajeh & Ohene-Okanta, 2000). It is an institution which prepares the younger generation to fit well and also become useful to the societies in which they live (Nketia, 1999). The school therefore plays a significant role in the preservation and perpetuation of traditional musical culture in Ghana. However, one may ask, is the school performing this functions effectively?

Considering the above discussion, it is important to acknowledge the role of some Christian churches in the perpetuation and preservation of traditional music among children in Ghana. The musical practices and activities of the Methodist and Mozama Disco Christo Churches follow the traditional pattern where acquisition of musical skills and techniques may be acquired through observation, imitation, and practice by learners. As active participants in the musical activities of these churches, children observe and put these observations into practice to acquire first hand musical skills and techniques as re-inforcement of what they learn in school. As Mills (1991) noted, music education is about active engagement with music. Teachers can take opportunity of this phenomenon to motivate and encourage their students to be conscious observers and participate actively in all musical activities including traditional sacred music performances in their churches and in the communities. They (students) should then be provided with opportunities to share and practically present their musical experiences in the classroom. By letting pupils become co-teachers, classroom teachers can then utilise pupils' presentations to teach the various elements of music to suit objectives of music lessons to achieve music literacy which will allow primary school students to recreate existing musical forms and also come up with their own.

Further research should consider a larger sample size to explore practices of traditional Ghanaian sacred music as practiced in Christian churches and its implication for music education in Ghanaian primary schools.

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